

VZCZCXRO2390  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #0613/01 0621140  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 021140Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6000  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000613

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MARCH 1 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT  
TALABANI

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary  
-----

¶1. (C) In a March 1 meeting with the Ambassador, President Talabani said the Turkish withdrawal from the north opens the door for a political solution; said he hopes to visit Turkey March 10-12 to talk frankly with them about the PKK as well as come away with an agreement to restart the trilateral (Iraq-Turkey-U.S.) talks. Talabani does not expect much from Iranian President Ahmadinejad's March 2-3 visit to Baghdad, describing it as a "protocol" visit during which they would sign some unimportant agreements in areas such as trade. Talabani believes Ahmadinejad will not be visiting Najaf and Karbala because Grand Ayatollah Sistani did not agree to the visit, and characterized the lack of the visit as a real deficiency in Ahmadinejad's schedule. Talabani confirmed that PM Maliki and the full Executive Council will be involved in the the Long-Term Strategic Relationship (LTSR) negotiations, said the PCNS will meet on Monday to discuss forming a new Cabinet, and claimed that there is general agreement that provincial elections should still be held no later than October 1. End Summary.

Turkey and PKK  
-----

¶2. (C) President Talabani, accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, met with the Ambassador on March 1. Talabani said the Turkish withdrawal from the north now opens the door for a political solution. He thanked the Ambassador for his interventions; the Ambassador noted that the situation was stopped before it got out of hand, and now it is time to take political advantage of the situation, including scheduling Talabani's promised visit to Turkey. Talabani said he hoped to visit March 10-12, and will take the Ministers of Oil, Water, and Interior with him because the Turks want to discuss a range of issues. Talabani said he wants to meet first with President Gul, then with Prime Minister Erdogan, and then have a private meeting with both together in order to have an off-the-record discussion about Iraq, relations with Iran, Kirkuk, the PKK, and the Kurdish situation overall. He mentioned that he will also need to discuss with them privately something that Ahmadinejad agreed to. Talabani would like to use the visit to restart the trilateral (Iraq-Turkey-U.S.) talks again; the Ambassador noted that the visit should result in agreement on mechanisms and agenda for the future, and that the trilateral meetings are one mechanism, but there also needs to be agreement on bilateral channels: some involving Turkey and Iraq, but some involving Turkey and the the Kurds speaking directly.

¶3. (C) Turkey is important to Iraq for three reasons, Talabani explained. It is very important in terms of regional balance; it is Iraq's "door to Europe;" and Turkey has a democratic Islamic government. Both Turkey and Iraq are friends of the U.S., and should work together. "We must

talk frankly about the PKK," Talabani declaimed. If the PKK continues to fight, we need to take effective measures against it, he said, and Barzani agrees with the need to send a strong message to the PKK to lay down its arms and end the fight, or leave Iraq. Talabani noted that the Turks are now speaking to the Iraqis in fairly conciliatory terms; confirmed that the Turks had invited KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani to visit Turkey; and said that from his point of view that visit could take place either before or after his own visit to Turkey.

#### Visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad

-----

¶4. (C) Talabani outlined Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to Baghdad March 2-3, noting that he would have a separate meeting with Ahmadinejad. The Ambassador urged Talabani to use his influence to persuade Ahmadinejad not to use the visit to attack the U.S., and to talk frankly to Ahmadinejad about Iran's future and the need to deal with Iraq as a sovereign state. Talabani agreed, and assured the Ambassador that if Ahmadinejad attacks the U.S., publicly or privately, he will respond and not let it pass. Talabani said frankly that he does not expect much from the visit; it will not solve any problems between Iraq and Iran; but it may calm things down for a while. The visit should be seen as one of protocol, meant to demonstrate brotherhood and friendship, but nothing more, Talabani said. The GOI will sign some unimportant agreements with Ahmadinejad, he said (Barham elaborated that these would be on trade, customs, transit, and the like), but "reaching a good strategic relationship is impossible," which Talabani noted as one reason Iraq needs a good relationship with Turkey.

BAGHDAD 00000613 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Talabani said it was his impression that Ahmadinejad will not be visiting Najaf and Karbala because Grand Ayatollah Sistani did not agree to the visit, and reiterated a number of times that the fact that Ahmadinejad is not being received in Karbala and Najaf is a real deficiency in his schedule.

#### Long-Term Strategic Relationship; PCNS; Elections

-----

¶6. (C) PM Maliki will direct the Long-Term Strategic Relationship (LTSR) negotiations with the full cooperation of the Executive Council, Talabani said. He noted that the Presidency Council is constitutionally responsible for approving something like the LTSR, but said that in this case Maliki's approval would be necessary as well. Talabani agreed that everyone wants to avoid the problems encountered at the end of last year in negotiating the Declaration of Principles and the UNSCR renewal. Finally, Talabani said that the Principals Committee on National Security (PCNS) would meet on Monday (March 3) and the main topic would be the government (i.e., forming a new Cabinet), and said that everyone agrees that despite the veto of the provincial powers law, elections should still be held no later than October 1.

CROCKER